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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: December 11, 1959

SUBJECT:

PARTICIPANTS: Livingston T. Merchant, Under Secretary
for Political Affairs
Wilhelm G. Grewe, Ambassador of Germany

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I lunched alone with Ambassador Grewe at the German Embassy this noon shortly before his departure for Bonn and Paris. He told me at the outset that he was anxious to talk to me because he had become increasingly disturbed during the past month with what he termed a trend in American policy with respect to Berlin. I asked him what he meant. He said that from reports he had of the Working Group increasing emphasis seemed to be placed on the finding of a new status for West Berlin. This in turn he deduced rested on the acceptance of the improbability of German reunification for the entire foreseeable future and a consequent growing willingness to accept the status quo.

I told him that I thought his fears were greatly exaggerated. I said that it was true that reluctantly we had come to the conclusion during the past year that reunification was not an imminent possibility. I said that this belief had been forced on us largely by European opinion including Germany. I also noted in passing that we still differed with the Chancellor on the efficacy of the exertion of more influence toward the East by the GFR through exchanges and other measures with the GDR and through a more active policy with respect to Poland and Czechoslovakia.

I then turned to Berlin. I said the essential point was that we had no thought under present circumstances or under any conceivable new arrangement of withdrawing US forces from Berlin.

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This is the essential protection of West Berlin and we will remain there as long as the situation requires and we are wanted. This being the case I said I thought doubts and fears were totally unjustified.

I went on to say that we saw two possible arrangements with respect to Berlin. The first was an interim agreement with the Soviets on the terms contained in our last offer at Geneva. This involved maintenance unimpaired of our occupation rights. I said I did not think we could consider going beyond the terms of our last Geneva offer with the possible exception of accepting a modest reduction in allied forces if this alone stood in the way of reaching this agreement. I pointed out that in my view there was an important gain for all of us in the formulation which was the clarification of the rights of civilian access. The second possible approach I said was to find some new arrangement resting on a basis other than occupation rights but retaining as its essential element the presence of American troops in West Berlin. I said I thought we would be derelict if all of us did not rack our brains to see if we could find some such formula. For our own part I said we have not yet found one, but we intend to continue to search since with the passage of further time the validity of our occupation rights would come increasingly into question before world public opinion. He noted and I agreed that the effect of a change of status might be to create difficulty in securing a renewal of the NATO guarantee. This I said would have to be assured in advance.

Finally I said that it seemed to us that at the Summit meeting Berlin should be approached in the context of the discussion of German reunification and that it seemed logical to me that we should open the Summit as we had opened Geneva with an effort to secure Soviet acceptance of the Western Peace Plan and then only discuss Berlin in isolation, if we run into a Soviet stone wall as could be expected. I said that I thought it would be a mistake to pick up where we left off at Geneva. He agreed. The Ambassador seemed on the whole reassured by what I had said.

I then asked him when the Germans would have specific proposals for consideration on disarmament to the discussion of which they attached so much importance. He admitted that they had no ideas formulated yet insofar as he knew. In fact a recent Bonn report said they would await the availability of the Coolidge report and an opportunity to review it before they put down any ideas of their own on paper. I told Grewe that in my view primary stress on disarmament might be an effective tactic but that to me armaments essentially were symptoms of political tensions, not the reverse. He agreed wholeheartedly and added that this was a point on which he had a recurring bitter disagreement with the Chancellor.

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